

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

The Progressive Movement, 1890-1920



Lesson 1 *The Roots of Progressivism*

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Can politics fix social problems?

Reading HELPDESK

Content Vocabulary

muckraker a journalist who uncovers abuses and corruption in a society

direct primary a vote held by all members of a political party to decide their candidate for public office

initiative the right of citizens to place a measure or issue before the voters or the legislature for approval

referendum the practice of letting voters accept or reject measures proposed by the legislature

recall the right that enables voters to remove unsatisfactory elected officials from office

suffrage the right to vote

prohibition laws banning the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages

Academic Vocabulary

legislation a proposed law to be voted on by a governing body

advocate to propose a certain position or viewpoint

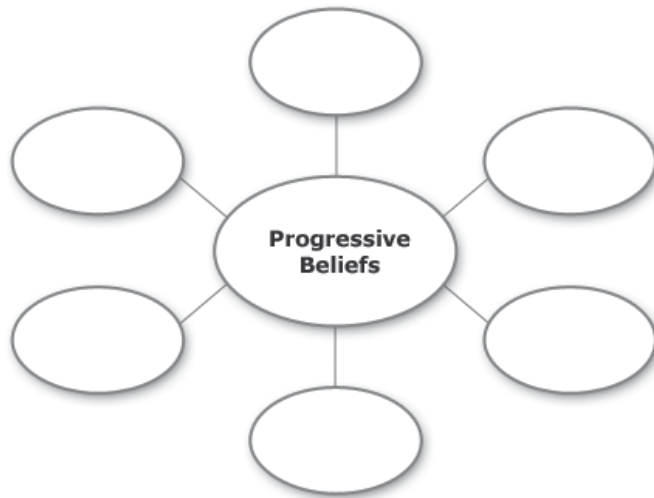
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The logo for 'networks' features the word in a bold, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, curved lines radiating from a central point, resembling a starburst or a network diagram.

TAKING NOTES: Organizing

ACTIVITY As you read about the beginnings of progressivism, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by filling in the beliefs of progressives.



IT MATTERS BECAUSE...

The Progressive Era was a time when many Americans tried to improve their society. They tried to make government honest and more democratic. They also worked to make government run more smoothly. Support grew for woman suffrage. People worked to limit children working. They also tried to reduce alcohol abuse, or the use of alcohol in a harmful way.

The Rise of Progressivism

GUIDING QUESTION Who were the progressives, and what did they believe caused social problems?

Progressivism was a group of different ideas and activities, not a very organized political movement with specific goals. Progressivism included a number of responses to problems in U.S. society. These problems had come from the growth of industry. Progressives had many different ideas about how to fix the problems they saw in U.S. society.

Who Were the Progressives?

Progressivism was partly a reaction against laissez-faire economics and its focus on the open market. Progressives believed that industrialization and urbanization had created many social problems. These problems included the poorness of the working class, and the dirty conditions and crime of urban society. Reformers did not believe the free market could fix these problems.

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Progressives belonged to both major political parties. Most progressives were urban, educated, middle-class Americans. Their leaders included journalists, social workers, educators, politicians, and religious leaders. Most progressives agreed that government should help solve society's problems. However, they did not think that the existing government could fix these problems. Progressives believed that government had to be fixed before government could in turn fix other problems.

One reason that progressives thought they could fix society was their belief in science and technology. Science had made the lightbulb, the telephone, and the car. It had helped people build skyscrapers and railroads. Because science and technology had helped people, progressives believed that they could use scientific ideas to fix problems in society.

The Muckrakers

Some of the first people to express progressive ideas were journalists who investigated and reported on social conditions and political dishonesty. President Theodore Roosevelt called these newspaper writers "**muckrakers**." He thought that the progressive journalists thought and wrote too much about scandal and corruption. Many people bought the cheap newspapers and magazines that published the muckrakers' stories. In this way, their ideas spread.

Muckrakers found corruption in many areas. Muckrakers such as Ida Tarbell and Charles Edward Russell reported on the unfair actions of large corporations. Other muckrakers reported on government and social problems. Lincoln Steffens reported on vote stealing and other corrupt political activities done by political machines.

Other muckrakers focused on social problems. Jacob Riis published the book *How the Other Half Lives* in 1890. The book included photographs and descriptions of the poverty, disease, and crime in New York City immigrant neighborhoods. The muckrakers' reports made people aware of these problems. In this way, the muckrakers encouraged people to ask for reform.

☒ **PROGRESS CHECK**

Stating What groups of people made up the Progressive movement?

Reforming Government

GUIDING QUESTIONS How did progressives hope to make government more efficient and responsive to citizens?

Progressivism included many different reform activities. Different issues led to different approaches. Some progressives disagreed on how to solve some problems. They agreed that government corruption was bad. However, they did not always agree on the best way to fix the problem of corruption.

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Making Government Efficient

One group of progressives used ideas from business in their plans for increasing government efficiency, or the ability to do something without wasting time, energy, or resources. Theories of business efficiency first became popular in the 1890s. Books such as Frederick W. Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) described ways a company could become more efficient. These ways included managing time, splitting tasks into small parts, and using tools that were made to be the same. Some progressives wanted to apply this scientific approach to government.

Progressives also saw corruption and inefficiency in city government. Many municipal leaders typically chose political supporters and friends to run city departments. Often, these people did not know much about managing city services.

Progressives supported two plans to reform city government. The first was called a commission plan. This plan divided city government into several departments. It placed each department under the control of an expert head known as a commissioner. The second plan was a council-manager system. This plan employed a city manager who was hired by the city council. In both plans, experts do a lot of the work of managing the city. Galveston, Texas, adopted the commission system in 1901. In other cities, political machines became weaker because voters elected officials citywide instead of by neighborhood.

Democratic Reforms

Another group of progressives focused on making government more democratic and more responsive to citizens. Many progressives believed that the best way to improve government was to make elected officials more responsive and accountable to voters.

Governor Robert M. La Follette made Wisconsin a "laboratory of democracy." La Follette spoke against the way political parties ran their conventions. Party bosses decided who attended the convention. Bosses also controlled the nomination of candidates. La Follette urged the state legislature to make a law that parties had to hold a **direct primary**. In a direct primary, everyone in the political party could vote for the candidate they wanted to nominate.

The direct primary soon spread to other states. Progressives also wanted three more reforms. These were the initiative, the referendum, and the recall. The **initiative** allowed a group of citizens to introduce **legislation**. This reform also required the legislature to vote on the legislation. The **referendum** allowed citizens to vote on proposed laws directly. They did not have to go to the legislature. The **recall** gave voters an option to demand a special election to remove an elected official from office before the end of his or her term.

Progressives also reformed the U.S. Senate. The U.S. Constitution told each state legislature to elect two senators. Political machines and business interests often influenced these elections. Some senators repaid their supporters with federal contracts and jobs after being elected. Reformers demanded direct election of senators by voters to end this type of corruption. In 1912 Congress passed a direct-election amendment. In 1913 the amendment was ratified and became the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution. Direct election was intended to end corruption in the election of senators. However, it also removed one of the state legislatures' checks on federal power.

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☒ **PROGRESS CHECK**

Summarizing How did progressives hope to solve problems through political reform?

Woman Suffrage

Guiding Question Why did the progressives support the woman suffrage movement?

The first women's rights convention was in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Elizabeth Cady Stanton convinced delegates that winning **suffrage**—the right to vote—was the most important issue. Decades later, women still did not have the right to vote. Suffrage became a major goal for female progressives.

Early Challenges

The woman suffrage movement started slowly. Suffragists were threatened with injury or harm. People said they were not acting as women should act. They were also described as immoral, or without a sense of right or wrong. Many supporters of suffrage were also abolitionists. Before the Civil War, they thought that ending slavery was more important than getting voting rights for women.

After the Civil War, Congress introduced the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. These amendments gave citizenship to African Americans and voting rights to African American men. Leaders of the woman suffrage movement wanted these amendments to give women the right to vote as well. They were disappointed when politicians refused.

The debate over these two amendments split the movement into two groups. One group was the National Woman Suffrage Association. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton founded this New York City-based group in 1869. The other group was based in Boston and was called the American Woman Suffrage Association. Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe led this group. The National Woman Suffrage group wanted to focus on passing a constitutional amendment to gain suffrage. The American Woman Suffrage group wanted to convince state governments to give women the right to vote first. This split weakened the suffrage movement. By 1900 only Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, and Colorado had granted women full voting rights.

Building Support

In 1890 the two groups united to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The movement still had trouble convincing women to become politically active. However, as the Progressive movement gained strength many women realized that they needed the vote to encourage reforms and pass labor laws. Women began lobbying lawmakers, organizing marches, and making speeches. Alice Paul was a Quaker social worker and former NAWSA member. She founded the National Woman's Party. Its members protested outside the White

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House. They blocked sidewalks and chained themselves to lampposts. Several protestors were arrested. After they were sentenced to seven months in jail, the women went on a hunger strike.

In 1915 Carrie Chapman Catt became NAWSA's leader. She tried to get woman suffrage moving in one final nationwide effort. More states granted women the right to vote. Congress began to favor a constitutional amendment. In 1918 the House of Representatives passed a woman suffrage amendment. However, the amendment failed in the Senate by two votes.

During the elections of 1918, Catt used NAWSA's resources to defeat two senators who were against suffrage. By August 1920, most of the states had ratified the woman suffrage amendment. On August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment went into effect. It guaranteed women the right to vote.

PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying Cause and Effect What progressive goals did suffragists believe they could achieve if women had the right to vote?

Reforming Society

GUIDING QUESTION What problems did social-welfare progressives attempt to reform?

Some progressives focused on fixing social problems, like crime, alcohol abuse, health, safety, and people's inability to read. These social-welfare progressives created charities to help the poor and disadvantaged. They also pushed for new laws that they thought would fix social problems.

Child Labor

Probably the most emotional progressive issue was the campaign against child labor. Children had always worked on family farms. However, mines—places where metals are dug from the ground—and factories had more dangerous and unhealthy working conditions. Muckraker John Spargo's 1906 book, *The Bitter Cry of the Children*, presented many details of child-labor conditions. The book told of coal mines that hired thousands of 9- or 10-year-old "breaker boys." These boys separated waste material from good coal. The mine paid them 60 cents for a 10-hour day. Spargo's book described how the work affected the boys physically. The work bent their backs permanently. It often crippled their hands. Reports like these convinced states to pass laws about child labor. The laws set a minimum (lowest) age for employment. The laws set other limits on child labor. These laws included maximum (most) hours children could work. States also began passing laws that required young children to attend school instead of working.

Health and Safety Codes

Many adult workers also worked in difficult conditions. Factories, coal mines, and railroads were all very dangerous. Workers were often hurt or killed on the job. Companies paid little or no money to workers or their families in the event of an

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injury or death. Progressives joined union leaders to encourage states to pass workers' compensation laws. These laws created insurance funds that employers paid for. Workers injured in accidents received payments from the funds.

The Supreme Court ruled in two cases about how much power the government had to regulate business to protect workers. The two cases were *Lochner v. New York* (1905) and *Muller v. Oregon* (1908). In the *Lochner* case, the Court ruled that a New York law that limited bakers to 10 hours of work per day was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court said the state did not have the right to interfere with the freedom of employers and employees. The *Muller* case involved women working in Oregon laundries. In this case, the Court supported the state's right to limit hours. The different decisions were based on different rules for men and women. The Court stated that healthy mothers were the state's concern. Therefore, limiting women's working hours did not go against their Fourteenth Amendment rights.

On March 25, 1911, a fire on the top floors of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City killed almost 150 of the factory's 500 workers. This disaster led to new reforms. It showed that there were not enough rules or inspections for adequate fire safety. New York created a Factory Investigating Commission. Soon, new laws reformed the labor rules.

Some progressives used zoning laws to protect people. These laws divided a town or city into zones, or areas. Different areas were for commercial, residential, or other development. The laws controlled how land and buildings could be used. Building regulations set minimum standards for light, air, room size, and sanitation. Laws required that buildings have fire escapes. Health codes required restaurants and other facilities to be clean for their customers.

The Prohibition Movement

Many progressives believed alcohol caused many of society's problems. Workers at settlement houses knew that people often spent their wages on alcohol. Being drunk often led to fights, injury, and sickness. Some employers thought drinking hurt workers' efficiency. These concerns started the temperance movement. The temperance movement **advocated** that people stop drinking, or drink very little alcohol.

Women were important leaders of the temperance movement. In 1874 a group of women formed the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). By 1911 the WCTU had nearly 250,000 members. Frances Willard served as the WCTU's second president for almost 20 years. She supported rights for women, including equal pay and suffrage. In 1893 some Protestant ministers formed another group, the Anti-Saloon League. In the beginning, the temperance movement focused on reducing drinking. Later it worked for **prohibition**—laws banning the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages.

Progressives Versus Big Business

Many progressives agreed that big business needed regulation. Some believed the government should break up big companies. Breaking them up would restore competition. This thinking led to the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890. Other progressives said that big business was the best way to organize the economy. They pushed for government to regulate big companies and prevent them from abusing their power. An early example of this thinking is the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), created in 1887.

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Some progressives even believed in socialism. Socialism is the idea that the government should own and run industry for the community. These progressives wanted the government to buy up large companies, especially industries that affected everyone like railroads and utilities. At its strongest, socialism had some national support. Eugene V. Debs had been the American Railway Union leader. He won nearly a million votes as the American Socialist Party candidate for president in 1912. However, most progressives and most Americans believed that free enterprise was better than socialism.

☒ **PROGRESS CHECK**

Explaining How did progressives seek to improve working conditions?
